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## ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE WAR<sup>1</sup>

HUGH FRAYNE

War Industries Board

IT IS difficult to speak of labor in these times without discussing the war, and it is difficult to speak of the war without discussing labor. Organized labor has been doing all that it possibly can in supporting the president and Congress in carrying out the war program. We have had a number of strikes, indeed; some of them not representative of organized labor. There has been a great deal of unrest and there has been justification for many strikes. We have today men who have placed a greater value upon profits than upon patriotism. They have been responsible for confusion and strikes. Things are improving now. While we have not wholly eliminated the possibility of strikes, we are bringing about a better understanding. Our difficulties hitherto have been due in part to our entering the war entirely unprepared.

This was a peaceful country. It thought peace and practised it. When we finally did have to enter the war, we needed legislation. We got it promptly; some of it is fifty years in advance of the present day. The conscription law had been opposed by organized labor as a fixed principle for years, but when it was enacted, the members of labor organizations as good citizens and patriotic men laid aside their opposition. When the Military and Naval Insurance Act was pending, Congress was severely criticized for the delay in enacting it. Critics forgot that this law dealt with new problems, problems that required careful consideration. Not only did we have to enact legislation, but we had to prepare to finance and feed the whole world except Germany and her associates. It is not strange that our first steps had to be taken slowly.

The work of the War Industries Board is not such that a great deal can be said in public concerning it. We have been doing some constructive work in the setting of prices on steel, copper, lumber, lead and other products necessary for the carrying on of

<sup>1</sup> Address at the meeting of the Academy of Political Science, December 15, 1917.

the war. These achievements establish a new idea in business. They were made possible by a harmonious understanding between the government as represented in the War Industries Board, and the representatives of the industrial interests concerned. Working in co-operation, we are getting production to the full capacity of the mines and the mills.

The War Industries Board is composed of seven members. The original chairman, Mr. Frank A. Scott, was unfortunately forced to resign a few weeks ago, on account of ill health, and his place was filled by the appointment of Mr. Daniel O. Willard. The other members are Judge Lovett, Commissioner on Priority; Mr. Brookins on Finished Products; Mr. Baruch on Raw Materials; Admiral Fletcher representing the navy; Colonel Pierce the army; and I, labor and industry. Every member of the board has a special work to do, but all work is subject to approval by the entire board unless the member wants to assume entire responsibility for his action, or unless some circumstance requires immediate action. If a member wants to assume entire responsibility, he may do so. The approval of the board is necessary not only for the work of individual members, but for the work of subcommittees. The one thing uppermost in the organization is to create the machinery to carry on and win the war so that we may get back again to normal conditions.

I will suggest a few of our problems: One is that of the employer who is seeking to take advantage of his labor force. The man who has been unfair, who has exploited labor, who has taken advantage of women in industry, who has been foremost in using child labor—that same man today wants to get the government to join with him in his idea of solving the labor problem. I find in almost every instance that he has made no attempt to meet present-day conditions, that his employees are compelled to exist upon the same wage as in pre-war times. When you expect labor, whether organized or unorganized, to get along with a dollar that is now worth but forty cents, you are expecting the impossible. The time, in my judgment, has come when the man who is unwilling to pay a living wage can no longer masquerade under the guise of patriotism and expect to be sustained in that position by the government of the United States.

Next, there is the problem of women in industry. Women are employed on our street cars here; in some places they are working as section hands; in other places they are employed in round-

houses and other places absolutely unfitted for the employment of women. I do not want to see the clock turned back a hundred years. A blacksmith shop or a machine shop is no place for a woman; if we are going to save the world for humanity, we must have a humanity in the world to enjoy it. I know that there is as yet no necessity to use women in machine shops, at forges, and in round-houses. The man who is insisting on employing them there is the same man who has always exploited labor and treated it unfairly.

I turn to the question of unemployment. In a certain city a man advertised for one hundred mechanics; he kept on advertising until he got a thousand. He advertised thirty-five cents an hour pay for skilled labor and twenty-nine cents for unskilled. When he had a large surplus of labor assembled, he said to the thirty-five-cent men, "We shall have to reduce you to thirty cents; there are men clamoring for the jobs." On the same plea he cut the twenty-nine-cent men to twenty-seven cents. Some of the workers, lured to the city by his advertising, were stranded, and their unions had to furnish them transportation to other places. To create this sort of unemployment is a poor sort of patriotism.

My idea of this war is that everyone must help. No one has a right to take advantage of someone else and plead war conditions as an excuse. Rich people in this city today are unable to secure coal though they have plenty of money, but every day, in peace as well as war times, there are thousands of working-class families in this city who are cold and hungry; they are suffocated in tenements in which human beings should not live and they are starving in a land full of plenty. Do you believe that the exploiters who bring about that condition are entitled to call themselves true patriots? The war is helping us realize that the one great thing in the world is humanity, and that unless it is recognized and protected and nurtured, everything else counts for nothing.

Organized labor has been criticized for not being sufficiently patriotic. But organized labor, you must remember, has had to deal with a big problem owing to the vast army making up our membership, composed of practically every nationality under the sun. These men and women come from other countries where they have not had so much liberty and freedom as here, and they retain the characteristics and ideals of their home

country, injecting those ideas into their life here. In dealing with this great cosmopolitan group, we have had to spend weeks and months trying to Americanize them in a short time, trying to make them realize their responsibilities and their opportunities, but it has naturally been a slow and difficult task.

Everyone of us has something to do in connection with this world war. No matter how little it may be, everyone can do something. Co-operation should be the watchword until victory comes. We want no false patriotism. But we must stand ready to surrender our very lives, if necessary, in the great cause of world liberation, the real establishment of civilization, humanity, unity, harmony—a democracy that will endure for all time.